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Excellence In Fibers XI Opens at Contemporary Craft

PITTSBURGH, PA (February 2026) – Contemporary Craft is pleased to announce the next exhibition in the new David Zeve Gallery for Regional Artists, *Excellence In Fibers XI*. This exhibition opens on Thursday, March 19, with an opening reception from 6-8 PM, and is on view through June 27.

Excellence In Fibers XI examines the expansive field of contemporary fiber and textile practice through works **that range from** traditional techniques to complex expressive forms. The exhibition highlights artists who critically engage material, process, and technique, and challenge the conceptual and physical boundaries of fiber.

Organized by *Fiber Art Now* and juried by its creative team, this curation features forty finalists published in the *Fiber Art Now* Winter 2026 issue (Vol. 15). From this cohort, eleven works were selected by Contemporary Craft. The eleven works include techniques such as basketry, embroidery, felting, weaving, and quilting, among others.

Excellence In Fibers is an annual exhibition that showcases the best of current international fiber and textiles to a growing global fiber art community.

About the Artists

Pamela Becker (b. 1943) takes photographs wherever she goes to remind her of the wonderful shapes and colors which exist in the world around us. For Becker, the landscape is both the source and the inspiration. Her college chemistry class lecture on the structure of molecules and studying these images has led to understanding that the world around her is all based on molecules. In nature everything starts with these very small elements repeated over and over to make the final image. This observation was critical to developing her manner of working.

Blair Martin Cahill (b. 1965) often imagines a narrative before she begins stitching—who the figure is, the world they belong to, and what they might be feeling. That backstory guides the gestures, expressions, and details, allowing her work to resonate beyond surface beauty. For Cahill, thread is both material and metaphor: a bridge between art and emotion, transforming embroidery into a form of storytelling capable of conveying feelings that extend beyond words. Each stitch becomes a line of empathy, inviting viewers to engage not only with the visual richness of embroidery but with the lives and emotions it evokes.

Cahill earned her BFA from California Institute of the Arts and an MA in Fine Art from the University of the Arts London, Chelsea. Additional study at Art Center College of Design in California, along with the Digital Fabrication Residency, merged her exploration of tradition and technology.

Ruth Gowell (b. 1949) learned to weave in 1969 as an apprentice to a weaver outside Copenhagen, Denmark. After returning to the US and getting a loom, she continued on her own to learn different techniques, and by the late seventies she focused on multi-layered warp face weave with viscose rayon dyed in color progressions. Gowell has continued exploring this technique and has combined

it with the kiln formed glass she makes. Gowell's studio is in the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria, VA.

Jill Kerttula (b. 1951) started with an art major specializing in printmaking. Following that she spent years as a professional graphic designer and art director. She taught college-level art and design classes. In 2014, she left professional design work and started working full-time as a fine artist. She is now a resident artist at the McGuffey Art Center in Charlottesville VA. Her fiber work explores her love of texture through photography and conventional and unconventional quilting techniques. Her work has received many awards in international and national shows. Notably, In 2015, Kerttula spent a month as the Artist-in-Residence at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In 2018, she was one of two international artists chosen to present a solo show as a 'Rising Star' at the International Quilt Festival. She had a solo show at the Rocky Mountain Museum of Quilts in 2018. In 2019 and 2021, she was juried into the prestigious international 'Quilt National' biennial show. In International competitions, Kerttula has won awards for "Innovation in Artistry", "Award of Excellence" and "Unique Voice". Her piece "Just Thinking" was invited to the 2024 Taiwan Art Quilt Society's International Art Quilt Exhibit.

Lisa Klakulak (b. 1975) is an artist and educator living in Asheville NC. Klakulak graduated in 1997 with a BFA in Fiber Arts from Colorado State University after which she earned a Visual Arts Teaching License while an Artist-in-Residence at Tennessee Tech University's Appalachian Center for Craft from 2002-2005. Exploring, making and teaching under the guise of STRONGFELT, Klakulak's work has been recognized through American Craft Council and James Renwick Alliance Awards, and publications such as Fiber Arts, Surface Design Journal, Shuttle Spindle Dyepot, Fiber Art Now, American Craft and several international Felt Journals. With a reputation for technical precision and its opposite, wanderlust, her career and aesthetic have been marked by worldwide travel, conducting workshops in over a dozen countries. Having completed a Master's Degree in Sculpture in Spring 2020, Klakulak's recent work dials in on the correlation of concepts of space in material, social environments and the psyche.

Katy Levit (b. 1971) is a Bainbridge Island-based artist whose creative journey spans more than three decades. After 30 years immersed in ceramics, she found herself drawn to a new medium: fiber. What began as a simple curiosity has since evolved into a dedicated practice rooted in traditional basket weaving techniques. Using waxed linen thread, Katy hand-twines intricate sculptural forms that are at once delicate, resilient, and deeply expressive. Her work pushes the limits of her materials. Playing with balance, bold color palettes, and recognizable forms, her pieces reflect the joy she finds in their making. At the same time, her sculptures explore more intimate and complex themes—women's empowerment, mental health, and domestic life—blending personal experience with broader cultural narratives.

Each piece becomes a quiet meditation on process, material, and the enduring strength of craft. Through slow, repetitive motion and intuitive design, Katy creates vessels of meaning that honor both tradition and transformation.

Heather Macali (b. 1984) is an artist, craftsperson, and educator based in Detroit, Michigan. She holds an MFA in Textiles from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and teaches at Wayne State University, specializing in weaving, dyeing, textile design, and spinning. With over twelve years of national exhibition experience, Macali's practice centers on deepening the hand-to-material relationship through structure, color, and process. Her work has been featured in Fiber Art Now (January 2026) and selected for the juried exhibition Excellence In Fibers XI at Contemporary Craft in Pittsburgh, PA. She is also included in Creative Dimensions in Weaving by Stacey Harvey Brown, a reference publication on three-dimensional weaving. Recent projects include co-curating

Fiber Flux at the College for Creative Studies and exhibiting Structure & Color at Moraine Valley Community College and the Dairy Barn Arts Center.

Ruby Silvius (b. 1957) is an internationally acclaimed artist known for her miniature paintings and collages created on used tea bags. In 2015, she launched 363 Days of Tea, a daily practice and visual journal in which she transformed emptied tea bags into a new artwork each day for 363 days. Working through drawing, painting, printmaking, and collage, she creates moody, evocative, and at times playful imagery on delicate teabag paper.

Silvius is the author of 363 Days of Tea: A Visual Journal on Used Teabags and Reclaimed Canvas: Reimagining the Familiar. Her practice extends beyond tea bags, as she continually reimagines everyday materials—such as eggshells, paint chips, leaves, wine corks, rocks, and paper bags—as surfaces for artistic expression.

Gerri Spilka (b. 1951) is recognized for her use of bold abstract figuration suggesting a human narrative. Her textile work has been widely exhibited in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. It is held in private and public collections including the International Quilt Museum and Study Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, and in Park Towne Place Art Collection, the Fox School of Business at Temple University, and Jefferson University and Hospital. Spilka holds a Master's Degree in Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Carnegie Mellon University, and a Master's in Psychology from Temple University. Raised in metropolitan NYC, Gerri lives and works in Philadelphia.

Janet Tsakis has a B.A. in Visual Arts from Rutgers University and received an M.A. in Arts Education from Kean University. She has exhibited throughout the NYC tri-state area and received the Leila Gardin Sawyer Memorial Award from The American Artists Professional League, NYC and the 2016 Florence B. Andreson Memorial Award from the National Association of Women Artists, NYC. Other honors include the Geraldine Dodge Full Fellowship Award at Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT and the Geraldine Dodge Fellowship, Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA. Her work has been published in several local publications, Fiber Art Now, Hudson Reporter and Adirondack Journal. She is a member of Center for Book Arts, NYC and Guttenberg Arts. She is also a retired public school art educator.

Charlene Virts (b. 1956) is a fiber artist based in Sonoma wine country, the Cascade mountains, and the Sonoran Desert. From saddle blankets in Nevada's cowboy country to wearable art in California's Sonoma Valley, most of her work has been focused on weaving. In Central Oregon, she began exploring the history and possibilities of pine needle baskets. Each of her sculptures are made of pine needles gathered near her home. Virts has collected baskets from around the world — storage baskets from the Philippines, Hawaiian coffee harvest baskets, Labradorean grass baskets, and sweet grass baskets from South Carolina.

About Contemporary Craft

Presenting contemporary art in craft materials by regional, national, and international artists since 1971, Contemporary Craft offers cutting edge exhibitions focusing on multicultural diversity and contemporary art, as well as a range of artist-led studio workshops, community engagement programs, and a store featuring work by top artists from across the country. Located at 5645 & 5688 Butler Street in Pittsburgh, PA, Contemporary Craft's exhibitions are free to the public.

